

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF TUBERCULOSIS IN CHILDREN

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While the Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in Children is in no way connected with the Department of Health of Porto Rico it has had the enthusiastic endorsement of this organization from the time it began its activities over two years ago until now.

The society was started by a group of people who realized the tremendous need of initiating a campaign to save delicate, poorly nourished children from the white plague. They realized that the first step necessary was to take children out of homes where there were members of the family suffering from tuberculosis and save them from becoming victims of the disease.

The first summer after the society was organized a camp was opened for pre-tuberculous school children and through the help of the Department of Health, private organizations, and generous donations made by a number of philanthropic persons, a group of girls were given a real taste of country life, with wholesome food and recreation for two weeks, followed by a group of boys who enjoyed the same privileges.

The same plan was carried out during the following summer and in September 1925 a Temporary Home for pre-tuberculous children was started. The method used by this society in caring for the children of tuberculous parents is similar to that used by the famous Grancher Society of France. The only difference being that in Porto Rico the Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in Children, places children in the temporary home, builds them up by furnishing them good food and plenty of fresh air, and then finds foster-homes for those who either have no parents or whose relatives or parents have not sufficient means with which to support them or give them the special nourishment and hygienic treatment they need.

The way the Grancher Society cares for the children of tuberculous parents is stated by Armand Delille in a recent number of the *World's Health* as follows:

“After a child has been declared eligible for admission by the doctors of the Association, it is sent to the country and boarded out with a healthy peasant family chosen among the clientele of the country doctor who knows better than anybody else the state of health as well as the material and moral status of his patients. Fortunately, it is not difficult to find families among the small

farmers, more especially childless couples or war widows, willing to take these children and to treat them as they would their own, in return for a small sum. It must not however, be imagined that these children are abandoned by their own families; on the contrary, it is the parents themselves who place them out through the intermediary of the association, and they are allowed to visit their children on condition that they observe certain hygienic precautions and provided they do not settle in the district. The children attend the village school and lead exactly the same kind of life as the local peasant children, with the result that pale somewhat sickly little Parisians soon become as robust and as rosycheeked as the country children.

“In principle the wards of the association only return to their homes when all risk of infection is removed, either by the parent being cured or alas, as happens only too often, by the death of the sufferer. The country doctors conscientiously watch over the children and visit them once a month at least. The secretary general of the association and the public-health nurses also make frequent tours of inspection.

“Since the war, special centres for bringing up infants have been created according to a system adopted in the United States. This system consists in placing the children in care of peasant women who are closely supervised and who are obliged to bring their charges for consultations once a week. In addition to this the public-health nurse attached to the centre, who prepares and distributes the daily milk supply, pays rounds of visits in the afternoons to the foster-mothers, in order to make sure that they are observing the rules of hygiene, and that the infants who are under their care until they are eighteen months of age are receiving proper attention including plenty of fresh air and light.”

The excellent results of the association's work during the last twenty years can be partly understood from the following statistics which Armand Delille mentions:

“Apart from the statistics furnished by the numerous departmental branches, over 2,500 Parisian children have been cared for by the central body of the association. Among these children, whom we were able to observe during a period of seventeen years, both at the weekly examinations for admission as well as on the annual rounds of inspection in the country, only seven cases of tuberculosis were registered. Two of these, cases of tuberculous meningitis, proved fatal whereas the other five, being localized tuberculosis were cured after receiving appropriate treatment at the sanatorium. These children were admitted to the association at ages varying from three to ten and remained for different periods corresponding to the length of time their parents were infected with the disease; in case of orphans, the period is extended to thirteen years. Only a few rare cases of infantile cholera and tuberculous meningitis occurred at the special centres for infants, and the mortality rate among the latter was reduced from 95 to 6 per cent. Unless infants exposed to tuberculosis have been separated from their mothers at the time of their birth, it is very difficult to avoid infection which very often takes the form of fatal meningitis. In spite of these very rare manifestations of tuberculosis which, however, we do not wish to hide, the results obtained by the association have been fully confirmed, or even exceed the expectations of its founder. Statistics quoted at the Rome Congress in 1912 demonstrated that among children who remain in contact with tuberculous parents,

clinical manifestations of the disease occur to the extent of 60 per cent, before the death of the parent, and of these, two-thirds die from rapid development of the disease and the remaining third from localized (or surgical) tuberculosis which is only curable by marine heliotherapy. Among the wards of the association, however, the morbidity has been reduced to less than 0.3 per cent. and the mortality to less than 0.1 per cent."

Delille then goes on to show that the economic results of the work done by the Society well justify the expenditures incurred:

"As, in order to obtain good results, each child must be kept for a period varying from three to five years, we must reckon the sum of 3,000 to 5,000 francs as the cost ensuring a good healthy citizen. These figures should be compared with the cost of treating a tuberculous patient in a sanatorium, which amounts to over 7,000 francs per year. At least three years' treatment is necessary in order to cure a patient, and even then the chances of his being cured are only one out of three. Therefore, an outlay of over 60,000 francs must be reckoned in order to save a tuberculous subject, whereas a healthy child can be protected from tuberculosis for the sum of three thousand to five thousand francs. These results prove that the institution founded by Grancher in 1903 has been most successful from every point of view."

The Grancher Association, or *Oeuvre Grancher*, as they call it in France, has a capital of over 1,000,000 francs besides various subventions from the Government, the *Counsel General*, the Municipality of Paris and a few private organizations of public welfare.

What has been done for the pre-tuberculous children in France can also be accomplished in Porto Rico. When we realize that the rate of infant mortality is so great here that 8,109 infants under one year of age—148 per 1,000 living births—died during the year 1924—1925 from various diseases, and that 198 children under fifteen years of age died of tuberculosis during that same year we feel that no effort can be too great in behalf of the thousands of children in Porto Rico who succumb to the white plague because of lack of proper food and lack of due precautions being taken to avoid contagion.

At present there are twenty children of the Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in Children, in the Temporary Home. A matron is employed who gives special vigilance to the preparation of the food for the inmates. An abundance of good milk is supplied so that each child may take the daily portion that the physician orders it to have. The dormitories are light and so well ventilated that the inmates have as much air as if they were sleeping on porches.

Within a few days after the children have been admitted to the home a marked change is noticed in their physical aspect. The signs of ill-nourishment disappear, their cheeks fill out and as a

result of the systematic routine established by the home, for meals, bathing, recreation and rest, the inmates who when admitted are in a state of decline or are extremely delicate soon become robust.

The Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in Children in Porto Rico hopes to gain the interest of the public to such an extent that the Temporary Home may be well supported, so that many more children may be cared for in it and by arresting the disease in a considerable number of children, cut down the enormous rate of victims of the white plague, and at the same time build up a healthier rising generation.

